

ARABIC CULTURE AND ARABIC STUDIES IN UKRAINE

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The acquaintance of the Ukrainians with the Arab World started, as it seems, simultaneously with that of Byzantium. Constantinople was at that time a big international centre, so it is not strange that the Ruthenians (Rūs) who visited it had an occasion to meet the Arabs. The acceptance of the Christian faith in 988 brought some knowledge of the history of the Middle East, where the main events of early Christian history took place. Controversies and wars of Byzantium against the Arab Caliphate marked the Ruthenians' attitude towards the Arabs — who in the first chronicles were called "Ismailians", "Agharians". It was negative. It can be seen from the chronicle narration about the choice of religion by Prince Volodymyr for his country. At the same time, there is an example of tolerance in the writing of St. Theodosi of Pechersk who taught to be misericordious to all people, including "Sarazens".

In this period, knowledge about the Arab World was coming to us in Greek garb, through Greek intermediaries.

Another source of knowledge about the Arabs and their life was accounts of pilgrims to the Holy Land. Some of them left written travel notes. The best-known of them was Father-Superior Daniil, whose notes were conserved in many copies, which witnesses for their popularity. The gaining ground by the Ottoman Empire in the Black Sea basin and in Eastern Mediterranean did not contribute, of course, to the establishment of direct contacts between the Ukrainians and the Arabs, though it should be said that the tradition of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land was never interrupted, and lasted even to the 20th century. In this connection, one can mention the voyages of M. Smotrytsky, Monk Serapion, D. Korsunsky, V. Linytsky in old days, and Joseph Slipyi in the 20th century.

A very important place in this literature of travel notes belong, no doubts, to the work of Vasyl Hryhorovytych-Barsky, his "Wanderings...", published in St. Petersburg in 1778. The notes are accompanied by more than 150 drawings made by the author himself on the spot, which have conserved till nowadays the ideas about how Damascus, Cairo, Alexandria and other places looked at the beginning of the 18th century.

Ukrainian intellectuals took part, similarly to the representatives of other European countries, in anti-Muslim polemics (Y. Galatowsky, L. Baranowicz etc.). For the sake of justice we shall note that in Ukraine there were also manifestations of the so-called "turkophilia", i.e. contrasting Turkish Islamic practices concerning people of other beliefs to policies practised by the Catholic Church.

The Arab achievements in the field of Sciences were arriving to us from the West, via Western mediation, through Latin and other European languages. The Ukrainian scientists of that epoch knew the "Logic of Aviassaf" by Abū Ḥamid al-Ġazālī as remade by Mozes Maimonides, the astronomic treatise "Sixwings", the anonymous "Secret of Secrets". A known scholar originating from Ukraine, who was elected Rector of the Bologna Academy, author of incunabula "Prognosticon for current year 1483" Yuri Drohobytch very often referred to the works of the Arab astronomer Ġaʿfar Abū Maʿšar al-Balḥī (d. 886), and mentioned also Ibn Rušd.

If we look into the courses in Philosophy or Physics which were taught in the 17th-18th centuries in the Kyiv — Mohyleana Academy, we shall see that Ukrainian scholars, together with the works of Ancient and West-European authors, dealt with the treatises of Ibn Rušd, Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), al-Fārābī. For example, Theophan Prokopovitch in his "Physics" quoted Avicenna many times, sometimes confirming him and sometimes disproving.

It is interesting to note that some historic facts of the Christian-Islamic controversy found a specific reflection in a fiction work by a Ukrainian author — Kassian Sakovytych. In his poem "Verses for the most painful funeral of valiant knight Petro Konashevych-Sahaydachny", written in 1622, along with the heroes of Antiquity (Hector, Achilles, Phemistocles etc.), to whom he compared Sahaydachny, the author mentioned also "Salatin-King", the well-known commander, winner over the Crusaders — Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn.

In the 18th century, the acquaintance with Arabic culture in Ukraine was done via translations from Western languages, and of course from Russian and Polish. Translations into these languages, for example, of the "1001 nights", were carried out already in the 18th century.

Scholarly study of the Arabic language started after the foundation of the Kharkiv University in 1804, but after Prof. B. Dorn left Kharkiv for St. Petersburg, the chair of Oriental languages was abolished.

In 1823, the College of Oriental languages (later-Oriental Institute) was opened in Odessa, which later became Lycée Richelieu. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Arabic language, among other Oriental languages, started to be taught in the University of Lviv. Naturally, Arabic was taught at the Crimean madrasas.

Existence of such centres of the Arab studies conditioned the appearance in Kharkiv of some publications about the culture of the Arab peoples. In Lviv in 1913, a translation of the sacred Moslem book — The Holy Qurʾān — from the original was realized, the manuscript of which is conserved in Lviv. The author of the translation is Olexander Abaranchak-Lyssynetski.

In the 19th century, Ukrainian culture was enriching its knowledge of the East in general, and Arabic culture especially, from Western and Russian sources. The direct ties that existed at least in the framework of the Orthodox church, were interrupted. But in spite of that, the Middle East, Islam, and, connected with it,

Arabic vocabulary, were gradually absorbed by Ukrainian men of literature. The works by T. Shevchenko, M. Starytsky and, especially, P. Kulish, who even dared to compose a dramatic scene entitled "Mohammed and Khadidja" (1883) where he shows these two persons belonging to the history of the Arabs in a positive way. It is evident that this was not an isolated case, because he wrote a short poem, under the title of which one finds the remark "*à l'arabe*". It was a, maybe not successful, attempt to imitate Arabic poetry.

Interest in the person of the Prophet of Islam was showed by a great Ukrainian writer and scholar, Ivan Franko (1856-1916). When he was a student at the Vienna University, he prepared a paper entitled "The materials concerning the legend about Mohammed among the Slavs", which he presented to the Seminar of Prof. V. Jagic. His scientific works show that he actively used Oriental materials, for example the works by S. de Sacy, when elaborating them.

Especially known is Ivan Franko's contribution to the popularisation of Arabic literature. When they started publishing tales from the "1001 nights", he in 1912-1913 made a translation of poetic insertions for the second edition of the book. It was done from a German translation.

Till now his remakes of the Arabic tales "Abu Qassem's babouches" and "Bassim, the Blacksmith" enjoy a large popularity. He managed to create in fact original works, using as a point of departure Arabic material, taken from German translations. Publication of "Bassim, the Blacksmith" was accompanied by a foreword written by Franko with a good knowledge of the time of Halīfa Hārūn ar-Rašīd. He tried also to master a form of Oriental poetry — *ğazal*.

Our great poetess Lessya Ukrainka (1871-1913) was also interested in the East and in the Arab East, especially. She wrote about the Ancient East, Crimea, but could not omit the contemporary life of the Arab people either. She visited Egypt three times (1909-10, 1911-12, 1912-13). She wrote a cycle of verses "Spring in Egypt", in which she, with all subtlety, reflected on the nature of this country and the not easy life of the people and even the political picture of its existence as a British colony. As a tribute to the history of the Arab world served her dramatic dialogue "Aisha and Mohammed", a short-story "Egbal — Hanem" was consecrated to contemporary Egypt. We see that the first direct contacts between the Ukrainians and the Arabs immediately gave its fruits.

A separate chapter of Ukrainian-Arab cultural relations is the creative activities of a prominent scholar, Agathangel Krymsky (1871-1942). He made a huge contribution to all branches of Oriental Studies. As to Arabistics, one can mention the fact that he translated many works into Ukrainian and Russian, he also edited academic courses: "History of Arabic Poetry in essays and samples" and "A History of Arabic literature, profane and religious". Add the works on the history of Islam, a great deal of articles to different encyclopedias which were published in Russia at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. He is also author of

“Beirut Short Stories” (1906), “Letters from Syria” (1897), the latter were published in Arabic in Beirut. They were realistic and positive towards the Arabs, vivid pictures of popular life in Lebanon.

In the 30’s he wrote a fundamental “History of Modern Arabic Literature” (19th – beginning of the 20th century), an equal to which is not written till now. But this book was published in Moscow only in 1971.

Unfortunately, the Stalinist regime annihilated this outstanding Ukrainian Orientalist.

After 1917, it is a new period of the acquaintance of Ukraine with Arabic culture, mainly through Russian intermediaries, because the Arab World and Ukraine, besides many other things, were divided by an ideological barrier.

Nevertheless, a poetic book by Amīn Rīḥānī, “Revolution”, appeared. The translation and foreword were signed by A. Kovalivsky. In Kyiv, an “Elementary grammar of the Arabic language” by Tawfiq Kezma was published in Russian, it served as a manual at the Courses of Oriental languages organized by the All-Ukrainian Scientific Association of Orientalists.

But such a situation did not last a long time. At the beginning of the 30’s the Ukrainian Oriental Studies, coming into being, was destroyed. Many specialists became victims of repressions. Academician A. Krymsky was arrested in 1941, and died in prison in January 1942. That is why in after-the-war years Ukraine, a country with a population of 50 million, found itself without such a discipline as Oriental Studies. Only in Kharkiv, after his return from exile, Prof. A. Kovalivsky explored the Arabic sources for the ancient history of Ukraine. In Kyiv the Arabic language was taught as an optional subject by T. Kezma, my teacher. There were some attempts to renew teaching Arabic at the Lviv University, which before the war had been an important centre of Oriental Studies in Poland. The language was taught by the Azerbaydjanian Muhammed Sadyk-bey Agabek-zadeh; he prepared also a manual. He was assisted by several Arab teachers as well as by T. Levicki, later a known Orientalist.

Thus, Arabic Studies in Ukraine in the 50-70’s were represented by works about Arabic sources on the history of our country (A. Kovalivsky, V. Beilis, Y. Dashkevych, Y. Polotniuk), about contemporary Arabic literature (author of this communication), later, about Arabic manuscript collections in Ukraine (V. Rybalkin).

The wave of the national liberation movement turned attention to the life of the Arab peoples, to their literatures. A whole series of translations of Arab authors appeared. First they were made from Russian translations, but afterwards, more and more, translations were made directly from original texts. A great role was played by the known review *Vsesvit* (The World) in the popularisation of Arabic literature.

There were published, from the authors of the older generation: Muḥammad Taymūr, Miḥā’il Nu‘ayma, Ğirġī Zaydān, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, and many collections of short stories by known contemporary prose-writers.

As separate books appeared the works by aṭ-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār (1982), Iḥsān ʿAbdalquddūs (1976), Yūsuf al-Kuʿayd (1983), French speaking Algerian writer Ṣalāḥ Fallāḥ (1978), Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Ḥusaynī, etc. The novel "A story without beginning and end" by the Nobel Prize winner Naḡīb Maḥfūz, and novels by aṭ-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ were also published.

We consider the publication, in translation directly from the Arabic language, of a solid volume of tales from "1001 nights" (1991) as well as of chosen sūras from the Holy Qurʾān, which were translated by Y. Polotniuk as an important achievement. It should be mentioned that some fragments from the Holy Qurʾān, which appeared in Ukrainian in London, are of a very poor quality.

As to poetry, we find among the translated authors such important contemporary poets of the Arab World as Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, Muʿīn Bsīsū, ʿAbdalwaḥḥāb al-Bayātī, Nizār Qabbānī, Maḥmūd Darwīš, Aḥmad Dahbūr, ʿAbdarraḥmān al-Ḥamīsī, as well as considerable collections of French-speaking Algerian poets.

Naturally, the events of the contemporary history of the Arab World found their reflection in the works of Ukrainian authors: the struggle against colonialism, the Palestinian tragedy, the war in Lebanon, as well as cooperation between the two peoples. In 1966, a short novel, "A legend of the Nile" by A. Khyzhniak, was published in Kyiv. It is about the construction of the Assuan High Dam. This work received an International Gamal Abdel Nasser Prize in 1973. Much attention was paid in our press to Miḥāʾil Nuʿayma, whose name is connected with Ukraine. He, as it is known, from 1909 till 1911 pursued his studies at the Poltava Seminary.

The proclamation of Independence on August 24, 1991 opened considerable possibilities for Ukrainian-Arab cultural cooperation. At last the Ukrainians entered in direct contact with the Arabs. Now, when there are neither ideological obstacles nor interdictions of the colonial powers, there rests a big obstacle — economic difficulties in our country.

Nevertheless, in Kyiv in the system of the National Academy of Sciences, an Institute of Oriental Studies named after A. Krymsky, headed by a well known Orientalist Academician O. Pritsak was created. The Institute started activities: organized a number of successful scientific conferences, renewed publishing the scientific review "The Eastern World", which ceased to appear in 1931. There is an Ukrainian Association of Orientalists. An important part, in preparation for publishing of Oriental, including Arabic, sources to the history of Ukraine (9th-12th centuries, Liberation war of 1648-1654) is being carried out by the Institute of Arcograph and Sources Research of the National Academy of Sciences.

The fact that we see the beginning of teaching Arabic in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, is very significant. It gives a ground to look with some optimism at the future of Ukrainian Oriental Studies.

To explore the history of Oriental Studies in Ukraine is now an easier undertaking than before. Several bibliographic indices which can serve as a base for further

researches were published. Bibliographies of A. Krymsky, A. Kovalivsky, O. Pritsak, Y. Dashkevych, V. Beilis, Y. Kochubey, as well as an index to the review *The Eastern World* (1927-1931), have been published.